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ABSTRACT

The document discusses a project that sought to create sustainable service learning programs in community colleges. In 1997, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (District of Columbia) began a 3-year grant project to increase the number, quality, and sustainability of service learning programs in community colleges nationwide. Fourteen colleges worked together in AACC's project, Community Colleges Broadening Horizons through Service Learning, to overcome challenges and learn valuable lessons in developing and sustaining academically based service learning programs. These Horizons Colleges used a variety of activities and strategies to ensure institutional and community support for service learning. The strategies fell into 14 categories, which include administration involvement and support; climate; community collaboration; curricular integration; and faculty development and involvement. Involving all levels of the college administration in service learning--from department chairs and deans to vice presidents and presidents--is an important strategy. Many Horizons Colleges discovered the effectiveness of service learner presentations to college governing boards. This strategy works well because students tend to be the most effective promoters of service learning. Effective service learning cannot happen without well-designed community partnerships. Regular agency orientations or training sessions can help community partners understand the difference between service learning and volunteerism. (Contains 18 references.) (JA)

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Creating Sustainable Service Learning Programs: Lessons Learned from the Horizons Project, 1997-2000. Project Brief.

Gail Robinson

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Creating Sustainable Service Learning Programs: Lessons Learned from the Horizons Project, 1997-2000

by Gail Robinson

In 1997, the American Association of Community Colleges began a three-year grant project to increase the number, quality, and sustainability of service learning programs in community colleges nationwide. Fourteen colleges—selected in a national competition for grants ranging from $4,000 to $10,000 per year—worked together in AACC's project, *Community Colleges Broadening Horizons through Service Learning*, to overcome challenges and learn valuable lessons in developing and sustaining academically based service learning programs.

AACC brought together a team of four experienced service learning mentors who assisted 10 mentee colleges. These *Horizons* Colleges used a variety of activities and strategies over three years to ensure institutional and community support for service learning. The strategies fell into the following categories:

- Administration involvement and support
- Climate
- Community collaboration
- Curricular integration
- Faculty development and involvement
- Program development and management
- Student participation and leadership
- Sustainability and institutionalization

While the *Horizons* Colleges received AACC/Corporation for National Service grant funds to support their activities, most of the strategies and actions they identified can be achieved by other institutions, even without internally designated or external funding. The colleges learned important lessons about developing a solid base of support from which their service learning programs could grow. As a result, from January 1998 through June 2000, they reported that 6,689 students had performed 111,438 hours of direct community service, worked with 760 faculty and administrators, and served 1,951 agencies and schools and more than 75,000 individuals.

Horizons Mentee Colleges

Century College, MN
Gadsden State Community College, AL
Iowa Western Community College, IA
NorthWest Arkansas Community College, AR
Nunez Community College, LA
Oakton Community College, IL
Richland College, TX
Skagit Valley College, WA
Southwestern College, CA
University College, University of Cincinnati, OH

Horizons Mentor Colleges

Albuquerque TVI Community College, NM
Glendale Community College, CA
Johnson County Community College, KS
Miami-Dade Community College, FL

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Successful Strategies for Program Sustainability

Participants in the American Association of Community Colleges' *Horizons* project found the following strategies and actions important to creating sustainable service learning programs. The 14 participating colleges implemented these strategies on their campuses and in their communities between 1997 and 2000. No single college employed every one of the strategies.

STRATEGY OR ACTION	Albuquerque TVI	Century	Gadsden State
ADMINISTRATION INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT			
Involve all levels of administration, especially chief academic officer: invite to class reflection sessions, etc.	●		
Provide college budget support	●		●
Involve administrators with community partner organizations; generate positive publicity	●		●
Use outside experts: host a presenter admired by administration	●		
Arrange for presentations by students to board, administrators to department chairs, etc.	●		
CLIMATE			
Celebrate and recognize achievements and service, through student awards, scholarships, administrative incentives	●	●	●
Produce positive publicity and promote visibility	●		●
Provide for the cultivation and recruitment of a lead faculty member	●		●
Conduct "taste of service" or "service day" events and service fairs each academic term	●	●	●
COMMUNITY COLLABORATION			
Train agency representatives in service learning pedagogy; provide orientation handbook for agencies	●		
Develop an agency directory listing service learning partners	●		
Recognize outstanding agencies and conduct service fairs	●		●
Build relationships with and between agency partners and faculty: host breakfast or lunch meetings, etc.	●		
Use a service learning advisory board, committee, or action team chaired by community partner			
CURRICULAR INTEGRATION			
Provide topic-specific workshops or activities on reflection, curricular integration, academic products, etc.	●		●
Feature service learning in course descriptions in college catalog, class schedules, etc.			●
Develop and offer 1- to 3-credit service learning course, through student services, human services, honors		●	
Provide faculty-to-faculty mentoring			
FACULTY DEVELOPMENT AND INVOLVEMENT			
Provide service learning handbook and faculty training workshops	●		
Support travel and encourage presentations and formal publications by service learning faculty members	●		●
Provide a designated faculty coordinator for service learning	●		●
Recruit and mentor new faculty via one-on-one relationships with experienced faculty			
Collaborate with center for teaching and learning or other internal professional development entities	●	●	
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT			
Include a formal assessment for service learning, e.g., through office of institutional research	●	●	
Link evaluation with institutional goals and report assessment results to stakeholders	●		
Provide physical space and staff for a service learning center	●		
Establish an action team or advisory board comprising administrators, faculty, community partners, students			
STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP			
Identify student ambassadors for service learning, representation on planning/advisory/agency boards			
Organize student presentations to faculty meetings, board meetings, conferences, classes			
Arrange in-class presentations by agency partners			
Celebrate student achievements and provide recognition, e.g., certificates, awards, scholarships	●	●	●
Provide notation on transcripts and/or individual portfolio development			
SUSTAINABILITY AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION			
Include service learning in long-range planning, mission; connect to institutional initiatives, grant proposals	●		●
Provide a budget that includes a service learning coordinator and/or physical space	●	●	●
Make service learning a degree requirement			
Identify political power to support and ensure sustainability	●		
Assure academic integrity and rigor in all aspects of the program	●		

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They found that a combination of these was most useful when applied to individual college situations and community and campus culture. The chart below indicates where each *Horizons* College used a particular action or strategy well. The final column indicates strategies that can be undertaken with little or no funding.

Glendale	Iowa Western	Johnson County	Miami-Dade	NorthWest Arkansas	Nunez	Oakton	Richland	Skagit Valley	Southwestern	University College	Requires no extra funding
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Administration Involvement and Support

According to national surveys conducted by AACC in 1995 and 1997, the support of key administrators is crucial to developing and sustaining service learning programs. These findings are borne out by the experiences of the 14 *Horizons* Colleges.

Involving all levels of the college administration in service learning—from department chairs and deans to vice presidents and presidents—is an important strategy. Administrators who teach can set an example for other faculty by integrating service learning into their own courses. Top-level administrators can provide direct support by identifying budget line items for service learning programs.

Nunez Community College's *Horizons* project director is also the college's chief academic officer. A tireless promoter of service learning, she was in a position to provide budget support as well as moral support to faculty new to service learning.

Students are powerful advocates. Service learning coordinators or directors should invite administrators to student reflection sessions so they can hear students make the connection between their service experiences and their course objectives. Administrators may be more likely to promote and support service learning if an "outside expert" (i.e., someone from a national organization promoting service learning or from a college with a sustained program) speaks on campus, or if community agencies demonstrate their desire for service learners and a closer partnership with the college. Administrators who already support service learning can encourage their peers and faculty to support and try it.

Many *Horizons* Colleges discovered the effectiveness of service learner presentations to college governing boards. This strategy works well because students tend to be the most effective promoters of service learning. Students see firsthand, and convey with personal testimony, how they can make a difference in their communities while learning course material in a more meaningful way.

Other strategies the *Horizons* Colleges found useful included administrators providing incentives for faculty participation, sending administrators to service learning conferences, and recognizing administrators who support service learning.

Climate

Service learning programs are more successful on campuses where the climate is supportive, positive, and celebratory. Existing campus climate may or may not promote service. Creating a positive climate is an important task for service learning coordinators and directors. One way to do this is to recognize students for their service activities, through scholarships, awards, certificates, and end-of-year celebrations. Another way is to keep service learning in the public eye, through press releases, newsletters, annual reports, and newspapers.

Some *Horizons* Colleges carefully cultivated and recruited faculty members to lead service learning efforts on campus. By choosing faculty who could inspire their colleagues, the colleges advanced the standing of service learning as part of campus climate. Lead faculty served as mentors to other instructors new to service learning and assured academic rigor in curricular integration.

Conducting service fairs or "taste of service" events were successful strategies at *Horizons* Colleges. Service fairs bring community partners to campus to recruit service learners, while a "taste of

A positive climate was created in different ways at *Horizons* Colleges. NorthWest Arkansas Community College's project director organized regular service learning celebration and recognition events. Century College provided service learning scholarships through a local agency. Oakton Community College's president proposed allowing time for staff and administrators to serve in the community.

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service" usually is a one-day event where students, faculty, staff, and administrators can work together in neighborhood clean-up or educational activities.

Additional strategies included developing service learning websites, involving student organizations and programs, and linking service learning to institutional mission and goals.

Community Collaboration

Effective service learning cannot happen without well-designed community partnerships. College service learning practitioners should consider their counterparts in social service agencies, K-12 schools, local government, and community-based organizations to be "co-teachers" in the learning process.

Many *Horizons* Colleges implemented regular agency orientations or training sessions, to ensure that their community partners understood the difference between service learning and volunteerism. Agency representatives appreciated the opportunity to be part of the teaching and learning process, and overwhelmingly found students to be assets to their organizations. The colleges also developed directories listing all community partners, as well as service learning handbooks for agencies.

University of Cincinnati's University College bolstered its program by asking a key community partner to chair its service learning action team, giving the community heightened visibility and a strong voice at the college.

Building relationships with agency and school representatives is critical in sustaining college service learning programs. Hosting breakfast or lunch meetings on campus and visiting each community site worked well for many *Horizons* Colleges. They learned the value of including community partners on service learning advisory committees or boards, not only to build relationships but also to ascertain community needs and assets.

Other strategies used by the *Horizons* Colleges included recognizing outstanding partners at annual celebrations, developing links between college and community websites, presenting jointly at conferences and workshops, and giving community partners access to college resources and facilities.

Curricular Integration

Service learning is most effective when integrated into course objectives and learning outcomes. Faculty often need training to determine the best way to include service components in their curricula. *Horizons* Colleges organized workshops, brown-bag lunches, and one-on-one mentoring to show faculty how to guide critical reflection, redesign syllabi, determine appropriate academic products, and identify appropriate service sites.

Each year more colleges feature service learning in course descriptions in college catalogs and class schedules. These notations give service learning a public face and recognition as part of the curriculum. This is also a good way to distinguish course sections that require service learning or offer it as an option.

Some *Horizons* Colleges offer stand-alone service learning courses for up to three credits—usually through human services, student services, or honors—that emphasize the history and importance of service, community building, and civic responsibility.

Further strategies included maintaining a syllabi "bank," working closely with chief academic officers to ensure academic rigor, involving community partners in the curriculum development process, and creating interdisciplinary service learning projects.

Gadsden State Community College includes service learning in course descriptions and the college catalog. Richland College requires its honors scholars to do service learning. Iowa Western Community College created a separate service learning course as a means to begin integrating service into more disciplines.

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Faculty Development and Involvement

The *Horizons* Colleges developed faculty handbooks and guides with forms, instructions, and agency partner listings as an easy and lasting means of organizing and training faculty in service learning. Handbooks are usually distributed at faculty training workshops and are used as resources throughout the academic year.

Some *Horizons* Colleges provided funds for faculty to attend or present at service learning and disciplinary conferences, or to write for service learning publications. More and more community colleges have "centers for teaching and learning" that coordinate faculty development opportunities. Linking service learning to such centers proved advantageous for some *Horizons* Colleges as a way to benefit from existing infrastructure and resources and maintain academic rigor.

Designating a faculty coordinator helped colleges whose service learning staff was based in student services, because faculty tend to listen to other faculty. This strategy helps bridge the gap that sometimes exists between academic affairs and student affairs. Experienced service learning faculty also recruited and mentored newer practitioners in one-on-one relationships.

Interestingly, providing faculty stipends as incentives was not high on the *Horizons* Colleges' list of effective strategies. Many participants found that once a faculty member tries service learning, stipends are unnecessary and sometimes superfluous. More important is personal support and encouragement provided by faculty colleagues and administrators.

Skagit Valley College initiated service learning externships in which faculty serve at community agencies to learn about their work, develop closer ties to agency directors, and create more meaningful service opportunities for their students.

Other successful strategies consisted of giving presentations at departmental meetings, putting service learning on new faculty orientation agendas, incorporating service learning in tenure and promotion processes, and including service learning in faculty job descriptions.

Program Development and Management

Assessing and evaluating service learning is important to ensuring program sustainability. Gathering outcome-related data can help prove the value of service learning, document quality as well as quantity, and identify areas that may need improvement. *Horizons* Colleges with institutional research offices coordinated service learning assessment with ongoing initiatives and institutional goals. Assessment results should be reported to program stakeholders—faculty, administrators, students, and community partners—for continual program improvement.

Johnson County Community College's service learning coordinator works with the office of institutional research to distribute, collect, and analyze student and faculty surveys. Miami-Dade Community College has a centralized center for community involvement, with service learning staff on each of its six campuses.

These same stakeholders should be represented on a service learning advisory committee, board, or action team that meets regularly to provide feedback and guidance on program management, community needs and assets, and curricular integration.

Providing space for a service learning center or office is important to program longevity, visibility, and student and faculty recruitment. Staffing can be provided by a dedicated coordinator, existing student services or volunteer center personnel, faculty, Federal Work-Study students, or AmeriCorps VISTA members.

Additional strategies implemented by *Horizons* Colleges included developing annual objectives and

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marketing plans, producing and following timelines, and focusing on quality over quantity.

Student Participation and Leadership

Students can play many roles besides that of service learner. Sustainable programs use students as service learning ambassadors to recruit their peers to do service learning, track student hours, communicate with agency representatives, and assist faculty with student placement. Students can lead reflection sessions, serve on service learning advisory committees, and make presentations to college governing boards, faculty, students, and community partners. Involving students in service learning program management gives them a chance to develop leadership skills, work in teams, and collaborate with diverse populations.

Southwestern College designed a service learning student leadership course for students to develop and practice collaborative leadership skills, lead service learning projects, assist with student and agency orientations, and provide guidance and support to other service learners.

Some *Horizons* Colleges invited community partners to give in-class presentations about their agencies to encourage student involvement in and excitement about service learning. This was an effective recruitment strategy to increase student participation.

Colleges can celebrate and recognize student achievements in service learning at annual events; with certificates, awards, and scholarships; and by providing notations on transcripts or developing individual portfolios that feature their service experiences and reflections.

Other strategies used by the *Horizons* Colleges included encouraging students to initiate their own service learning projects, sharing reflections in campus-wide sessions or in publications, using Federal-Work Study students as program coordinators, and partnering with Phi Theta Kappa chapters.

Sustainability and Institutionalization

The *Horizons* Colleges found that service learning was likely to be sustained when tied to institutional initiatives such as recruitment, retention, and workforce development. Incorporating service learning in a college's mission statement, long-range or strategic plan, grant proposals, and accreditation reports are also useful strategies.

A college budget that allows for a full- or part-time coordinator in a service learning office is a sure sign of sustainability. So is the participation of key players with the political power to support and ensure the program's durability. Academic departments in some *Horizons* Colleges made service learning a degree requirement, cementing ties between academics and community service. Assuring academic integrity and rigor in all aspects of service learning is key to long-term sustainability and institutionalization.

Additional strategies included featuring service learning in college catalogs and websites, developing state or regional consortia for service learning, and fostering student, faculty, and community advocacy for service learning.

Glendale Community College has a permanent service learning center and Albuquerque TVI Community College has an office of experiential education, thanks to successful service learning projects and backing from upper-level administrators.

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Indicators of Service Learning Institutionalization

The American Association of Community Colleges developed the following list of indicators of service learning institutionalization. Colleges may institutionalize service learning without doing every item on this list. These are simply indicators that several *Horizons* Colleges have attained or done, and are meant to suggest directions for program management and improvement.

- College mission statement specifically mentions service learning.
- Strategic plan includes service learning.
- Accreditation report features service learning.
- Annual report features service learning.
- Service learning is identifiable in the college's budget line items.
- Course catalog and class schedule include service learning notation or description.
- Student transcripts include service learning notation.
- Course syllabi describe service learning activities and expectations.
- One or more faculty, administrators, or staff members coordinate service learning at least part-time.
- Service learning program is evaluated or assessed regularly.
- Service learning advisory committee/board meets at least once a year.
- The college's chief academic officer sits on the service learning advisory committee/board.
- At least one recognition/celebration event is held each year.
- Service learning publications are available in the college library, service learning resource center, or collection.
- The college's chief executive officer supports service learning.
- The college's governing board is aware of service learning.
- Campus publicity materials and/or student newspaper covers service learning.
- Faculty, students, and community partners receive service learning guides or handbooks.
- Service learning orientation for faculty is held at least once a year.
- Faculty development activities related to service learning are offered.
- Experienced service learning faculty members mentor newer service learning faculty.
- Service learning is recognized in the college's faculty roles and rewards structure.
- Faculty leaders (e.g., deans, chairs) encourage other faculty members to use service learning.
- Service learning orientation for students is held at least once per academic term.
- Federal Work-Study or honor society (e.g., Phi Theta Kappa) students assist with service learning program management/activities.
- Service learning orientation for community partners is held at least once a year.
- The college hosts and/or visits community partners at least once a year (e.g., at service learning advisory committee/board meetings, service fairs, one-on-one meetings).
- Community partners provide students with in-class and/or on-site orientation.

Horizons Project Contacts

AACC encourages readers to use this brief as a resource for planning and developing sustainable service learning programs. Most of the successful strategies used by the *Horizons* Colleges can be done without grant funds. Service learning practitioners may wish to contact the following individuals—project directors, mentors, and key participants in the *Horizons* project—for more information on their particular programs and strategies.

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Select Electronic Resources

America Counts
www.ed.gov/americacounts

America Reads
www.ed.gov/inits/americareads

American Association for Higher Education
www.aahe.org/service/srv-lrn.htm

American Association of Community Colleges
www.aacc.nche.edu/servicelearning

America's Promise
www.americaspromise.org

Campus Compact
www.compact.org

Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges
www.mc.maricopa.edu/academic/compact

Campus Outreach Opportunity League
www.cool2serve.org

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health
www.futurehealth.ucsf.edu/ccph.html

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www.nationalservice.org

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www.ipsl.org

Invisible College
www.selu.edu/orgs/ic

Learn and Serve America Training and Technical Assistance Exchange
www.lsaexchange.org

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
www.umn.edu/~serve

Points of Light Foundation
www.pointsoflight.org

Service-Learning on the World-Wide Web
csf.colorado.edu/sl

UCLA Service-Learning Clearinghouse Project
www.gseis.ucla.edu/slc

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